

## The Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul

The Feast of St Peter and St Paul is an annual public holiday in Rome, Italy on June 29th. It honors the Catholic saints Peter and Paul. The celebration is of ancient origin, the date selected being the anniversary of either their death or the translation of their relics. It is a day off for the general population, and schools and most businesses are closed.

Every year, Rome celebrates its patron saints Peter and Paul with various religious rituals led by the Catholic church's pope. Other events include music entertainment, fireworks, and fairs.

### BACKGROUND

St Peter was one of Jesus Christ's 12 apostles and spent most of his life preaching the Christian gospel after Jesus' death. He died by crucifixion around 67 AD and is regarded as the Catholic church's first pope.

St Paul, formerly known as Saul of Tarsus, was converted to Christianity on the road to Damascus shortly after Jesus Christ's death. He became an influential leader in the Christian church. He was beheaded around the year 67 AD during the Roman emperor Nero's persecution of the Christians.

<http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp?SID=4&ID=1&FSID=101840>

### SYMBOLS

On the Feast of St Peter and St Paul, the Catholic pope places the pallium (a type of woollen cloak) on archbishops that were appointed over the past year. It serves as a reminder of religious significance of the bishops' work and symbolizes the unity of the church.

A bronze statue of St Peter also gets spectacularly dressed up with traditional attire including a ring and a tiara and a rather large red cloak. Aside from the liturgical celebrations, Rome lays on quite a show in honour of its two patron saints. The most unique festivity takes place outside the Vatican: starting in St Peter's Square, volunteers build a spectacular carpet of flowers that leads down Via della Conciliazione and towards the River Tiber.

The other highlight is a massive firework show the same evening. Dubbed the Girandola ('pinwheel'), legend has it that it began during the Renaissance when Michelangelo designed a grand fireworks display lit from the Castel Sant'Angelo, culminating with an enormous fountain of sparks that poured over the round fortress like a giant Catherine wheel.

The practice became an annual tradition for four centuries. It was revived – with better safety standards – in the 2000s and now takes place on the Pincio Terrace overlooking Piazza del Popolo, ensuring the sparks can be seen all over Rome.

